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REVIEW

ballet.*magazine**Sylvie Guillem - Robert Lepage - Russell Maliphant**'Eonnagata'**March 2009**London, Sadler's Wells**by Bruce Marriott*

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As Sylvie Guillem stepped out on stage in a gorgeous red and white Alexander McQueen costume to narrate at the start of *Eonnagata* the omens looked good, I thought - her story, a creation myth of how the 2 sexes were created from one and long to be reunited was written well and beautifully articulated and you couldn't help thinking she'd make a marvellous mother come bed-time story telling.

But 40 minutes later and less than half way through I was already looking at my watch and lamenting a new piece of work that is not a brilliant success. *Eonnagata* is the collaboration of 3 huge talents and, while I can't speak for Robert Lepage, I can say that the finished product is not greater than the sum of the inputs from Guillem and Maliphant - they have both done better things separately and much better things together. When it comes to conceiving shows it's not clear that three brains are better than the insightful vision of just one, I'm afraid.

Eonnagata is about the life and death of the Frenchman Chevalier d'Eon, a soldier, diplomat, spy and person of perplexing gender, sometimes dressed as a man and sometimes a woman. His

life as both woman and man is imagined, embellished and explored in a number of cameo scenes, very occasionally stunning but often tedious, unclear or just uninspiring. Seeing Robert Lepage doodle on the floor with a fighting stick or Maliphant bang a drum is not inherently interesting, I think. Great use is made of



tables with mirrored tops or concealed lighting but they didn't seem to shed light on the Chevalier so much as look like tables that everybody had a good time work-shopping around.



Sylvie Guillem in *Eonnagata*
© Felix Dagenais

There are one or two magnificent sections as when Guillem, with Maliphant hidden behind, sprouts 4 arms - the duality of sexes - dreamily caressing and engulfing the Chevalier in love. And early on there is some pure dance for the pair, reminiscent of Push. *Eonnagata* is to tour internationally and Lepage, for one, likes to tinker with work, so I suppose there may be brighter prospects.



Sylvie Guillem in *Eonnagata*
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The performance closes with something none of us thought we might see - Guillem acting as a mortuary attendant. Unfortunately Guillem doesn't really have so much to say as a mortuary attendant.

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